

CRUSOES OF THE AIR.

A RECENT French work, translated and reproduced in America, gives an account of a pretended journey in a balloon across the Continent of Africa. It possesses a certain value in affording us a nearly complete *résumé* of African travel and discovery, and it describes the tribes, animals, and surface of the country with as much accuracy as we usually find in books of travel. The adventures of the *aéronauts* are varied, amusing, and only a little more wonderful than those that usually befall African travellers. The narrative exhibits all that attention to detail which makes De Foe's works so fascinating. The adventures have an air of plausibility, and even the very ingenious contrivances, described at length, by which the balloon rises or sinks at the will of the *aéronauts*, seem to the ordinary reader in every way practicable. There is a great charm in the idea of the journey, and the author has exhibited no little ingenuity in transferring to a new element those Crusoe-like adventures, for which all people at all times have so keen a relish. The party consists of three persons: one Dr. Ferguson, of the Royal Geographical Society, of great renown as a traveller; Dick Kennedy, his friend, an open, resolute, headstrong Scotchman, who is a great hunter and a mighty shot; and, lastly, Joe, a servant of Ferguson's, a devoted, whole-souled, incomparable fellow, who looks up to the doctor as the greatest man in the universe.

The expedition proves a triumphant one, and the balloon accomplishes all that the enthusiastic doctor had predicted. "With it," he would say, "every thing is possible; without it, I fall back into the dangers and difficulties as well as the natural obstacles that ordinarily attend such an expedition; with it, neither heat, nor torrents, nor tempests, nor the simoom, nor unhealthy climates, nor wild animals, nor savage men, are to

be feared! If I feel too hot, I can ascend; if too cold, I can come down. Should there be a mountain, I can pass over it; a precipice, I can sweep across it; a river, I can sail beyond it; a storm, I can rise away above it; a torrent, I can skim it like a bird! I can advance without fatigue, I can halt without need of repose! I can soar above the nascent cities! I can speed onward with the rapidity of a tornado, sometimes at the loftiest heights, sometimes only a hundred feet above the soil, while the map of Africa unrolls itself beneath my gaze in the great atlas of the world."

These new Crusoes undergo an abundance of adventure. In one of their halts they are attacked by the savages. In another, while anchored in a forest, the trees are set on fire by the natives. Another tribe lets loose upon them a great number of pigeons, each with its tail garnished with fire. They get becalmed in a desert, and nearly die of thirst. They kill a lion and a lioness with all the expertness of Gordon Cumming himself. We cannot give the space to recount all the extraordinary adventures that befell these novel travellers, but quote the following in full. Once having decided for a halt, their anchors, flung out from the car, were sweeping the excessively tall grass of an immense prairie:

"In truth, it was a charming excursion that they were making now—a veritable navigation on this green, almost transparent sea, gently undulating in the breath of the wind. The little car seemed to cleave the waves of verdure, and, from time to time, coveys of birds of magnificent plumage would rise fluttering from the tall herbage, and speed away with joyous cries. The anchors plunged into this lake of flowers, and traced a furrow that closed behind them, like the wake of a ship.

"All at once a sharp shock was felt—the anchor had caught in the fissure of some rock hidden in the high grass.

"We are fast!" exclaimed Joe.

"These words had scarcely been uttered when a shrill cry rang through the air, and the following phrases, mingled with exclamations, escaped from the lips of our travellers?

"What's that?"

"A strange cry!"

"Look! Why, we're moving!"

"The anchor has slipped!"

"No: it holds, and holds fast too!" said Joe, who was tugging at the rope.

"It's the rock, then, that's moving!"

"An immense rustling was noticed in the grass, and soon an elongated, winding shape was seen rising above it.

"A serpent!" shouted Joe.

"A serpent!" repeated Kennedy, handling his rifle.

"No," said the doctor, "it's an elephant's trunk!"

"An elephant, Samuel?"

"And, as Kennedy said this, he drew his rifle to his shoulder.

"Wait, Dick; wait!"

"That's a fact! The animal's towing us!"

"And in the right direction, Joe—in the right direction."

"The elephant was now making some headway, and soon reached a clearing where his whole body could be seen. By his gigantic size, the doctor recognized a male of a superb species. He had two whitish tusks, beautifully curved, and about eight feet in length; and in these the shanks of the anchor had firmly caught. The animal was vainly trying with his trunk to disengage himself from the rope that attached him to the car.

"Get up—go ahead, old fellow!" shouted Joe, with delight, doing his best to urge this rather novel team. "Here is a new style of travelling!—no more horses for me. An elephant, if you please!"

"But where is he taking us to?" said Kennedy, whose rifle itched in his grasp.

"He's taking us exactly to where we want to go, my dear Dick. A little patience!"

"Wig-a-more! wig-a-more! as the Scotch country folks say," shouted Joe, in high glee. "Gee-up! gee-up there!"

"The huge animal now broke into a very rapid gallop. He flung his trunk from side to side, and his monstrous bounds gave the car several rather heavy thumps. Meanwhile the doctor stood ready, hatchet in hand, to cut the rope, should need arise.

"But," said he, "we shall not give up our anchor until the last moment."

"This drive, with an elephant for the team, lasted about an hour and a half; yet the animal did not seem in the least fatigued. These immense creatures can go over a great deal of ground, and, from one day to another, are found at enormous distances from where they were last seen, like the whales, whose mass and speed they rival.

"In fact," said Joe, "it's a whale that we have harpooned; and we're only doing just what whalers do when out fishing."

"But a change in the nature of the ground compelled the doctor to vary his style of locomotion. A dense grove of *calmadores* was descried on the horizon, about three miles away, on the north of the prairie. So it became necessary to detach the balloon from its draught-animal at last.

"Kennedy was intrusted with the job of bringing the elephant to a halt. He drew his rifle to his shoulder, but his position was not favorable to a successful shot; so that the first ball fired flattened itself on the animal's skull, as it would have done against an iron plate. The creature did not seem in the least troubled by it; but, at the sound of the discharge, he had increased his speed, and now was going as fast as a horse at full gallop.

"The deuce!" ejaculated Kennedy.

"What a solid head!" commented Joe.

"We'll try some conical balls behind the shoulder-joint," said Kennedy, reloading his rifle with care. In another moment he fired.

"The animal gave a terrible cry, but went on faster than ever.

"Come," said Joe, taking aim with another gun, "I must help you, or we'll never end it." And now two balls penetrated the creature's side.

"The elephant halted, lifted his trunk, and resumed his run toward the wood with all his speed; he shook his huge head, and the blood began to gush from his wounds.

"Let us keep up our fire, Mr. Kennedy."

"And a continuous fire, too," urged the doctor, "for we are close on the woods."

"Ten shots more were discharged. The elephant made a fearful bound; the car and balloon cracked as though every thing were going to pieces, and the shock made the doctor drop his hatchet on the ground.

"The situation was thus rendered really very alarming; the anchor-rope, which had securely caught, could not be disengaged, nor could it yet be cut by the knives of our aeronauts, and the balloon was rushing headlong toward the wood, when the animal received a ball in the eye just as he lifted his head. On this he halted, faltered, his knees bent under him, and he uncovered his whole flank to the assaults of his enemies in the balloon.

"A bullet in his heart!" said Kennedy, discharging one last rifle-shot.

"The elephant uttered a long bellow of terror and agony, then raised himself up for a moment, twirling his trunk in the air, and finally fell with all his weight upon one of his tusks, which he broke off short. He was dead."

But, perhaps, the most original of their adventures was an attack by a dozen condors, the most formidable of birds. A battle with birds three thousand feet up in the air! Is not here a new incident for the sensational drama, or the sensational pictorial papers? Is there any thing quite like it in the whole range of romantic adventure?

"The condors flew around them in wide circles, their flight growing gradually closer and closer to the balloon. They swept through the air in rapid, fantastic curves, occasionally precipitating themselves headlong with the speed of a bullet, and then breaking their line of projection by an abrupt and daring angle.

"The doctor, much disquieted, resolved to ascend so as to escape this dangerous proximity. He therefore dilated the hydrogen in his balloon, and it rapidly rose.

"But the condors mounted with him, apparently determined not to part company.

"They seem to mean mischief," said the hunter, cocking his rifle.

"And, in fact, they were swooping nearer, and more than one came within fifty feet of them, as if defying the fire-arms.

"By George, I'm itching to let them have it!" exclaimed Kennedy.

"No, Dick; not now! Don't exasperate them needlessly. That would only be exciting them to attack us!"

"But I could soon settle those fellows!"

"You may think so, Dick. But you are wrong!"

"Why, we have a bullet for each of them!"

"And suppose that they were to attack the upper part of the balloon, what would you do? How would you get at them? Just imagine yourself in the presence of a troop of lions on the plain, or a school of sharks in the open ocean! For travellers in the air, this situation is just as dangerous."

"Are you speaking seriously, doctor?"

"Very seriously, Dick."

"Let us wait, then!"

"Wait! Hold yourself in readiness in case of an attack, but do not fire without my orders."

The birds then collected at a short distance, yet so near that their naked necks, entirely bare of feathers, could be plainly seen, as they stretched them out with the effort of their cries, while their gristly crests, garnished with a comb and gills of deep violet, stood erect with rage. They were of the very largest size, their bodies being more than three feet in length, and the lower surface of their white wings glittering in the sunlight. They might well have been considered winged sharks, so striking was their resemblance to those ferocious rangers of the deep.

"They are following us!" said the doctor, as he saw them ascending with him, "and, mount as we may, they can fly still higher!"

"Well, what are we to do?" asked Kennedy.

The doctor made no answer.

"Listen, Samuel!" said the sportsman. "There are fourteen of those birds; we have seventeen shots at our disposal, if we discharge all our weapons. Have we not the means, then, to destroy them or disperse them? I will give a good account of some of them!"

"I have no doubt of your skill, Dick; I look upon all as dead that may come within range of your rifle, but I repeat that, if they attack the upper part of the balloon, you could not get a sight at them. They would tear the silk covering that sustains us, and we are three thousand feet up in the air!"

"At this moment, one of the ferocious birds darted right at the balloon, with outstretched beak and claws, ready to rend it with either or both.

"Fire! fire at once!" cried the doctor.

He had scarcely ceased, ere the huge creature, stricken dead, dropped headlong, turning over and over in space as he fell.

Kennedy had already grasped one of the two-barrelled fowling-pieces and Joe was taking aim with another.

Frightened by the report, the condors drew back for a moment, but they almost instantly returned to the charge with extreme fury. Kennedy severed the head of one from its body with his first shot, and Joe broke the wing of another.

"Only eleven left," said he.

Thereupon the birds changed their tactics, and by common consent soared above the balloon. Kennedy glanced at Ferguson. The latter, in spite of his imperturbability, grew pale. Then ensued a moment of terrifying silence. In the next they heard a harsh tearing noise, as of something rending the silk, and the car seemed to sink from beneath the feet of our three aeronauts.

"We are lost!" exclaimed Ferguson, glancing at the barometer, which was now swiftly rising.

"Over with the ballast!" he shouted, "over with it!"

And in a few seconds the last lumps of quartz had disappeared.

"We are still falling! Empty the water-tanks! Do you hear me, Joe? We are pitching into the lake!"

Joe obeyed. The doctor leaned over and looked out. The lake seemed to come up toward him like a rising tide. Every object around grew rapidly in size while they were looking at it. The car was not two hundred feet from the surface of Lake Tchad.

"The provisions! the provisions!" cried the doctor.

And the box containing them was launched into space.

Their descent became less rapid, but the luckless aeronauts were still falling, and into the lake.

"Throw out something—something more!" cried the doctor.

"There is nothing more to throw!" was Kennedy's despairing response.

"Yes, there is!" called Joe, and with a wave of the hand he disappeared like a flash, over the edge of the car.

"Joe! Joe!" exclaimed the doctor, horror-stricken.

The *Victoria* thus relieved resumed her ascending motion, mounted a thousand feet into the air, and the wind, burying itself in the disinflated covering, bore them away toward the northern part of the lake."

The title of this amusing and really fascinating narrative is "Five Weeks in a Balloon."